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OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES

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THE NEW YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT

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Description

An analysis of the Subasich Cabinet, of the Tito-Subasich discussions and agreement which preceded the formation of a Government, and of measures taken to solve Subasich's most pressing problem, the acquisition of the allegiance of the Serbs.

11 July 1944

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SUMMARY

Two Serbs, two Croats, and two Slovenes form the new Cabinet of Premier Subasich. Of these, two, Sreten Vukosavlyevich, a Serb, and Drago Marushich, a Slovene, were appointed by Tito. The other Serb, Sava Kosanovich, has been for some time in the United States. The two Croats are Premier Subasich himself and Dr. Shutay, leading member of the Croat Peasant Party. The other Slovene is Izidor Tsankar, former Minister to Canada. Although Kosanovich and Vukosavlyevich are Serbs, Kosanovich is from Bosnia, and Vukosavlyevich, who is from Serbia proper, has been a member of Partisan administrative bodies. Thus Ambassador Fotich has charged that the Serbs are not represented. Since membership in the new government was by agreement limited to those not compromised by previous opposition to the Partisans, no Pan-Serbs who share Fotich's views are included. Fotich has now resigned, but is staying in the United States to represent Mihailovich.

On 16 June Tito and Subasich signed an agreement, which specifies that the Government will devote itself to organizing assistance to the forces resisting the Germans, that it will participate in joint bodies with the Partisans to govern the conduct of the war, of foreign policy, and of reconstruction, and that the issue of the monarchy is to be postponed. Each party agreed to issue a public statement indicating its position. In his discussions with Subasich, Tito declared that Mihailovich's

collaboration with the Germans had cost King Peter his popularity; but he indicated that this might be only temporary, and for the first time hinted that he might in the future support the King.

The British Foreign Office is planning to assist the new regime in its task of winning over the Serbs. General Popovich is to command Partisan forces in Serbia; and Ribnikar, a prominent Serb journalist and Partisan official, will probably head a new Partisan Serbian State Council. Brigadier MacLean, head of the British military mission, is to accompany these men on their trip to Serbia. The successful activities of "Tempo" (General Vukmanovich) in Serbia in recruiting Partisans and harassing the Germans are thus about to be heavily reinforced. The Serbs may well respond favorably to this appeal, and there is evidence that Mihailovich's representatives already fear this.

THE NEW YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT

I. THE SUBASICH CABINET

On 7 July 1944, Premier Subasich announced the formation of a new Yugoslav unity cabinet, composed of six men, two Serbs, two Croats, and two Slovenes. Of these six, two were chosen by and will represent Tito. Both have been members of the supreme legislative and administrative body of the Partisans, the AVNOJ (the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia).

Besides the premiership, Subasich will hold the posts of Foreign Minister and Minister of War. The two Partisan representatives are to be Professor Sreten Vukosavlyevich, a Serb, Minister of Supplies, Food, Forests and Mines; and Dr. Drago Marushich, a Slovene, Minister of Communications and Justice. Vukosavlyevich, who comes from Priyepolye (Serbia), was a member of the Partisan Presidium formed on 29 November 1943, and President of the Regional Council for the National Liberation of the Sanjak. Before the war he was at various times a professor at the University of Belgrade, a member of the Executive Committee of the Independent Democratic Party, and Under-Secretary in the Ministry of the Interior. Marushich, born in Slovenia, was interned in Italy before he returned to Yugoslavia about the first of this year. He has been very influential among the Slovenes of the Julian March, and before he was interned by the Italians he was a member of the Plenary Council of the Slovene Freedom Front in Venezia Giulia.

During the last war he volunteered on the side of the Allies, and worked for the Yugoslav cause in the United States. After the war he returned to Lyublyana, and became a lawyer and one of the leaders of the Slovenian Agrarian Party. Later he was Ban (Governor) of Slovenia for four years. He was also a member of the Yugoslav National Party and a minister in the Yugoslav government.

The other Serb representative, in addition to Vukosavlyevich, is Sava Kosanovich, who will hold the Ministries of the Interior, Social Welfare, Health, and Public Works. Kosanovich, who has been mentioned by Major General Velebit as enjoying the full confiedence of the Partisans, came to the United States as a member of the Yugoslav Ministerial Mission in August 1941. Since then he has remained in this country, and has opposed what he terms "the chauvinistic policy of the Serb National Defense League (Srpska Narodna Odbrana), which is supported by Fotich and many members of the Yugoslav Embassy." In his first interview as a member of the new cabinet, Kosanovich said that the new Government was based on "a complete turnabout in Yugoslavia's affairs" and that it "ends the life of the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile." "It is certain," he said, "that enemy propaganda will misrepresent the facts and say that the new development was directed against the Serbs." Kosanovich himself is a Serb born at Pleski in the Serbian part of Croatia, of an old family of Orthodox priests. He was elected to Parliament in 1927, and has been a Senator and

Minister of State. Since 1926 he has been the general secretary of the Independent Democratic Party. Because of his attacks on the Great Serbs, his pension was recently taken away from him by the Purich Cabinet.

The two Croat representatives will be Premier Subasich himself and Dr. Yuray Shutay, who will hold the same posts that he held in the Yugoslav cabinet of 2 January 1943, the Ministries of Finance and of Trade and Industry. Shutay is a leading member of Dr. Machek's Croatian Peasant Party, and has been one of their two most prominent representatives abroad.

Professor Izidor Tsankar, who, in addition to Marushich, will represent the Slovenes, will hold the post of Minister of Education. Tsankar, a member of the Slovene Peoples Party (Clericals), resigned in March 1944 as the Yugoslav Minister to Canada because of his deep differences of opinion with the Purich Government in Cairo. At one time he was a Catholic priest, and later became a Professor and an editor of the leading Slovene periodical Dom in Svet.

In a release to the press on 8 July, Ambassador Fotich refused to recognize the Subasich Cabinet. "It does not include among its members one single Serb from Serbia, political leaders in exile, or any true representative of the Serbian people, who number more than one-half of the population of Yugoslavia,"[1] he said.

1. According to Yugoslav official figures, all the Serbs in Yugoslavia total something under fifty percent of the population. To approach even this figure, it is necessary to include the Serbs from Croatia, Bosnia, Hercegovina, Montenegro, and the Voyvodina. The Serbs from Serbia proper, for whom Fotich was constituting himself speaker, do not in fact number more than one fourth the population of the country. See R & A No. 1366, "Handbook of Yugoslav Population Statistics."

Asked whether Kosanovich and Vukosavlyevich were not Serbs, he replied that "they come from provinces outside of Serbia and are not recognized as real political leaders." Fotich declared his allegiance to Mihailovich's National Committee, which was formed at the St. Sava Congress at Ravna Gora (sometimes referred to as the Ravna Gora movement) at the end of January 1944. Although Fotich himself was several weeks ago retired by Subasich, he did not turn over the embassy until 14 July, and has announced his intention of remaining in the United States to look after the interests of Mihailovich.

II. THE TITO-SUBASICH DISCUSSIONS

The new cabinet was formed on the basis of an agreement signed "on free Yugoslav territory" (Vis) on 16 June by Tito and Subasich, after their conference. The text of this agreement and of a memorandum on their conferences, presented by Subasich to Prime Minister Churchill, have now become available.

According to the agreement, the principal task of the new cabinet will be to organize assistance from the Allies for the use of the Army of Liberation and others who resist the common enemy of Yugoslavia. The Cabinet will also "harmonize Yugoslav representation abroad with the national rights of the country, with the people's needs, and with the fight for freedom" (that is to say, it will drop Great Serb diplomats). Tito's National

Committee and the new Royal Government will set up joint bodies to coordinate their efforts in fighting the Germans, in foreign policy, and in reconstruction. It is hoped that the formation of these joint bodies will eventually make possible the establishment of a single representation for the Yugoslav people. The issue of the monarchy will not be discussed until such time as the people of Yugoslavia are free to reach their own decision on the question.

Each party to the discussions agreed to issue a public statement after the formation of Subasich's cabinet. Subasich will recognize the achievement of the Yugoslav people during the last three years: the foundation of the federal organization of the State Community of Yugoslavs. His Government will recognize Tito's Provisional Government as the executive body of the National Committee of Liberation and the Anti-Fascist Council. He will acknowledge Tito's Army of National Liberation and condemn all collaborators. He will demand that all Yugoslavs unite in this Army. For his part, Tito will declare his intention to collaborate with the Royal Government, and will repeat his announcement that the organization of the State is not to be an issue until after the war.

In his memorandum to Churchill, Subasich reports on the conversations which led to the agreement. In order to secure the new Royal Government's support for the Partisan armies exclusively,

Tito showed Subasich documentary proof of Mihailovich's collaboration with the Germans in the King's name. Because of this collaboration, Tito declared, King Peter had lost his popularity and authority among the Partisans. Tito agreed, however, that the responsibility for these actions rested only with the members of former Yugoslav cabinets. He believes that the King can still improve his position, especially if his cabinet shows its readiness to assist the people and the resistance movement. Under such circumstances, Tito indicated, he might later feel able to take a more outspoken position. This is the first hint that Tito at some future time might support King Peter.

The discussion also covered certain military matters, which do not appear in the agreement. Subasich and Tito are shortly to meet Admiral Cunningham to settle the question of the command of the Royal Yugoslav Navy. Both parties agreed that the Navy would fly the Yugoslav flag without the Partisan Red Star. Tito asked that all persons who have expressed a wish to serve with the Partisans be placed at his disposal. This would presumably apply to all those members of the Royal Army in the Middle East who because of their Partisan sentiments have at various times been segregated from those loyal to Mihailovich. Tito approved the use in combat on Yugoslav soil of Yugoslav regulars wearing the Royal insignia. This may prove to have removed a possible source of friction and fits in with the plans of the British military.

Tito asked for certain supplies, for a permanent Partisan military mission in Italy, and for appropriate disposition of those Yugoslavs still in Italian concentration camps who may wish to join his forces.

In addition to naming Vukosavlyevich and Marushich as the two Partisan representatives to be included in the new cabinet, Tito is to designate a member of the Partisan Anti-Fascist Council as liaison officer with the Royal Government. This person will be a Serb from Shumadiya, the forest region to the south of Belgrade, often regarded as the heart of Serbia. Tito will also appoint delegates to several international commissions, in which Yugoslavia will participate. Tito has asked that Dr. Smodlaka, Foreign Minister of his Provisional Government, an elderly former diplomat from Dalmatia, be appointed as the delegate for Yugoslavia to the Mediterranean Commission.

The question of the reinstatement of Stanoye Simich as Ambassador to the USSR was also discussed at the conference. General Korneev, head of the Soviet Military Mission, gave Subasich the impression that such a move would be welcomed by the Soviet Government. Subasich is reported to have told both Korneev and Tito that it would first be necessary for Simich to place himself at the King's disposal. Simich resigned his post in protest against the Purich regime. He will now probably offer his services to the new Yugoslav Government and be re-named Ambassador to Russia.

III. THE PARTISAN PROGRAM FOR SERBIA

The problem of winning over the Serbs remains the outstanding task facing the new Royal Government. The difficulties likely to be encountered with the more intransigent Serbs in exile are partly indicated by Fotich's attitude noted above. But the most important part of the task will be found to lie within Yugoslavia itself. Since the new Government is a product of British policy, and part of the long-range British effort to reunite Yugoslavia, it is natural that the British government should now be turning its attention to the Serbian question.

Although the British Foreign Office feels highly pleased over the Tito-Subasich accord, it regrets that there is no provision for using King Peter as a bond to tie the great majority of the Serbs to Tito. However, a detailed program has now been adopted to further this end. The British are doing everything possible to encourage Tito to expand his movement into Serbia. The acceleration of his operations in this strategic area, and the avoidance of a civil war are regarded as essential, if perhaps somewhat contradictory, aims.

Tito is organizing a group of well-qualified Partisan leaders to be sent into the area to establish a State Council for Serbia. He will name the present commander of the 1st Partisan Corps, a Serb, General Popovich, Commander of the Partisan forces in Serbia. Popovich is known among the Partisans as a successful

leader, and is regarded as well equipped to take care of the difficult political or military questions that are sure to arise. In the group scheduled to go to Serbia there will be a very close friend of Topovich, Lt. Gen. Rankovich, also a Serb, as well as Edward Kardelj, vice-President for Slovenia on the National Committee of Liberation. Dr. Vladislav Ribnikar, vice-President for Serbia and acting Minister of Information on the National Committee, will also accompany this group and probably will be made President of the proposed State Council for Serbia. Ribnikar, a Serb of Slovene ancestry, joined the Partisans last November. He comes from a well known and prominent family of journalists in Belgrade, two of whom lost their lives fighting with the Serbian army in the last World War. Prior to this war Ribnikar was the owner and publisher of the most important Belgrade newspaper, Politika. Major General MacLean, head of the British mission, is to accompany these men into Serbia.

Although the Partisan organization had its start in Central Serbia, it has never been strong there. While the Serb and Croat peasants of Bosnia have lost virtually all their property, the peasant in Central Serbia is still comparatively well-to-do, and is naturally somewhat reluctant to embark upon a military adventure likely to lead to devastation of his lands. Effective anti-Partisan propaganda from the Germans, from the Nedich Government, and from the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile has aggravated the Serbians' natural tendency to look upon Tito's forces with

suspicion and animosity as Croats and communists. The new Partisan effort in Serbia, however, with its strong British backing, and support from King Peter, may well succeed in rallying the Serbs.

Already there are indications that the campaign may prove effective. Russell Hill, in a despatch written before 4 July, gives an accurate description of the growth of the Partisan movement in Serbia, even before the new decisions were arrived at. He attributes much of the success to the activities of a mysterious Serb leader known as "Tempo," and adds that "there are probably not a half-dozen people outside Yugoslavia" who know his real name. Tempo is a Montenegrin communist, with the rank of general, whose real name is Vukmanovich. Tito has given him a mandate for both Serbia and Macedonia. His deputy for Serbia has been Stambulich; for Macedonia, Apostolski. The desertion of Djurich, and the general success of Partisan recruiting in Serbia under Tempo would seem to show that the new Ribnikar-Popovich-MacLean group may make rapid gains.

That Mihailovich fears such a development is indicated by the generally conciliatory attitude adopted by his representative Topalovich in Bari. In conversation with Subasich, Topalovich said that the Serbian political parties had decided the Croat people were not after all responsible for the 1941 massacres of the Serbs in Bosnia, and that the Serbs appreciated

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Croat resistance to the Germans. Mihailovich has never previously been willing to admit either of these points. Topalovich even hinted that the Serb political parties would collaborate with Tito, and would sacrifice Mihailovich if some regular Yugoslav army officer (presumably a Serb) could be substituted. This would seem to indicate that Topalovich may now be ready to lead a movement away from the Serb extremists, leaving Mihailovich himself deprived of all support except that rendered by the Pan-Serb (Srbski Klub) elements, such as Molyevich and Vasich.

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